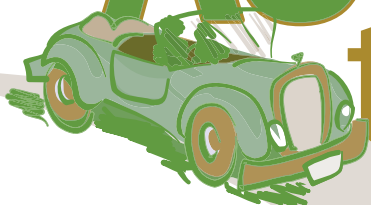


DuPuis
AUTO
tour



sfwmd.gov

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Welcome to the DuPuis Management Area. DuPuis is a 22,000-acre publicly owned natural area that is open throughout the year for a variety of recreational pursuits. The South Florida Water Management District purchased DuPuis in 1986 through the Save Our Rivers program that enables state water management districts to purchase, restore and protect environmentally sensitive water resource lands. Previously, the area was known as the "White Belt Ranch" where the late John G. DuPuis ("due-pwee") maintained a working livestock ranch and grazed 2,500 head of cattle and 2,000 goats and sheep.



The DuPuis Management Area is now a crown jewel among publicly owned natural areas in southern Florida. Today, the District and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission manage the land. The agencies make available a diverse array of recreational experiences: camping, hiking, bicycling, fishing, picnicking, horseback riding and hunting.

You will learn more about the recreational opportunities and land stewardship practices at DuPuis along this 7-mile auto tour that concludes at the fishing pier at the end of this road. If you have questions, call the DuPuis office at (561) 924-5310.



Stop 1 – Pine Beetle Restoration

Bark beetles killed the dead trees you see. This area used to be a well-stocked forest of slash pine but bark beetles invaded it in the late 1990s. Bark beetles attack pines and live in the inner bark where they damage the tree's food-transport pathways. When trees are stressed and beetle infestations are large, the insects overwhelm the tree's defense and often kill expansive stands of trees.



Our land managers used several methods to try to stop the spread of beetles. They thinned the forest to improve forest health so that each tree's natural immune response would repel the beetle invaders. They also treated the trunks of high-risk trees with pesticide to ward off beetle attacks. Though now rather unsightly, the dynamic forest will replenish itself. At this time, the beetle infestation has subsided.

Stop 2 – Recreation

The orange blazes on designated trees mark the Florida Trail. The Florida Trail Association has developed a network of 22 miles of hiking trails within DuPuis. If you prefer a shorter hike, you can take a 2-mile round trip walk from Gate 2 to the old "Governor's House" and picnic there. The house, which no longer is in use, is a small structure the previous owners used as a hunt camp. You can use the picnic tables next to the house.



In addition to hiking trails, DuPuis has an extensive network of equestrian trails that are marked with circular blazes. The DuPuis Horseman's Association, a citizen support organization, has helped develop and now maintains the 40 miles of riding trails in cooperation with the District. The equestrian trail head is at Gate 3 where there are horse barns, paddocks and equestrian camping facilities.



Other recreational opportunities include overnight car camping at the family campground located one mile from the entrance to Gate 1, group camping by the Mound House located near the fishing pier, and backpack camping at designated spots along the hiking trails. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission manages a limited hunting season in the fall.

Stop 3 – Red Cockaded Woodpecker Reintroduction; Bald Eagles

We are managing the site to your left for the reintroduction of the federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. This native bird, once found widely throughout the southeastern U.S., used to inhabit DuPuis, but it left when the area became overgrown and unsuitable for it. These birds require an open pine flatwoods landscape and our land managers have worked hard to restore this once overgrown area. In addition to prescribed burns and mechanical manipulation to control the vegetation, we have inserted specially constructed nest cavity boxes into selected pine trees to provide needed nesting sites. Trees containing nest cavity boxes are marked with a horizontal white band. Once the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grants permission, breeding pairs will be trapped from a donor site off the property and relocated to this site at DuPuis.



The bald eagle is a threatened species that occurs in relatively large numbers at DuPuis. Since the Fish and Wildlife Commission began monitoring, an average of five to six pairs have nested on the property each year, with varying breeding success. DuPuis produced 100 fledglings between 1989 and 2002. Keep an eye out for these magnificent raptors.

Stop 4 – Exotic Plant Control

The control of exotic vegetation is an ongoing concern at DuPuis. Our land managers aggressively treat all known infestations. Melaleuca, Brazilian pepper and Old World climbing fern are the primary species of exotic plants here. All of these species are native to other countries. The dead trees along the rim of the pond in front of you are Melaleuca that were chemically treated. Melaleuca was the initial target at DuPuis and most are now dead.



Old World climbing fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*), a fern native to Australia, Asia and Africa, was first found in South Florida in the late 1950s and has spread rapidly since. This fast-growing fern kills native vegetation by growing over it in thick blankets and blocking needed sunlight. *Lygodium* is currently the worst exotic on DuPuis, requiring the majority of effort, time and money to eradicate.



Stop 5 – Fire

To your right, you will see an area that we burned intentionally. You can see char marks on the side of the pine trees. Our land managers carefully plan and set these “prescribed burns” to simulate historic fire to benefit plants and animals. The native plant communities at DuPuis are fire-adapted and need frequent fire. Animals adapt to fire by leaving the burn area, seeking unburned areas within the burn or using burrows to escape the flames. Vegetation begins to green up within days of a burn and animals are quick to return.



Frequent prescribed fire also reduces the occurrence of destructive wildfires. This is because a regularly burned area—about once every three years at DuPuis—does not allow the build-up of overgrowth that crowds out native plants needed by native wildlife. If left alone, overgrown areas eventually burn, usually out of control, and the results can be catastrophic. Land managers closely monitor weather and site conditions before and during a prescribed fire to ensure it burns safely and meets land management objectives.

Stop 6 – Marsh Restoration

The thickly vegetated marsh to your left was dry, short-grass pasture as recently as the late 1980s. Ranchers drained a large portion of DuPuis for pasture land between the 1940s and 1970s. Today, marsh plants, such as the spring-blooming pickerelweed with its profusion of purple flowers, have returned as a result of management efforts to restore wetlands.



Pickerelweed

We have curtailed over-drainage on more than one-fourth of DuPuis through a series of restoration activities. By plugging a number of interior drainage ditches that restored seasonal water levels, water-loving plants returned on their own. We also restored flow from the adjacent Corbett Wildlife Management Area into DuPuis to re-wet drained areas of cypress and marsh. Finally, we constructed a levee along the southern perimeter of DuPuis to keep the property’s major drainage canals from flowing into the offsite regional water management network. This significantly improved the area’s water regime and allowed portions of Everglades marsh to return.

Stop 7 – Upland Restoration

A healthy South Florida pine flatwoods community is an open landscape of low-growing saw palmettos mixed with pines and other shrubs and carpeted with diverse native grasses. The open forest is critical for the health of many of the area's native wildlife. Frequent fire and a natural hydroperiod maintain this landscape.



Saw Palmetto

The site in front of you used to be choked with dense, overgrown saw palmettos and other shrubs because of past over-drainage and lack of fire. To restore this area, managers used heavy-duty mowing equipment to break the dominance of overgrown vegetation and allow the growth of diverse ground cover. Regular prescribed fires through the area will burn more safely and produce improved ecological results.

Stop 8 – Florida Trail

The connector trail to your left leads to the Florida Trail that goes to the Corbett Wildlife Management Area. It is approximately nine miles from this point to the Corbett boundary. About two miles in, you will pass by the old Sheep Shearer's house. Along the way, you will see cypress domes and adjacent marshes that may contain a white profusion of spring-blooming lizard tail, with carpets of maidencane grass nearby. Be on the lookout for painted lady butterflies, migrating songbirds in the spring and fall, and other wildlife, including bobcats, deer and turkeys.



Stop 9 – Fishing Pier



Along the way to the fishing pier, you probably noticed the vegetation changed from an oak and cabbage-palm hammock to low, shrubby plants. Look back to the east of the fishing pier and you will notice the outside edge of a strip of hammock that stretches to the southeast. This is the original boundary of the Everglades. Native Americans used to live along the edge, sheltered by the hammock and sustained by the water and bounty of the Everglades. One hundred years ago, it was possible to canoe from this spot to most points along the coast where I-95 is now.

Shell Lake formed when we took fill out of the area in the early 1990s to build the graded roads at DuPuis. We have enhanced the shoreline with a variety of wetland plants that attract wildlife and provide a nursery for small fish and other creatures, such as freshwater shrimp. A healthy shoreline serves as the basis for the food chain in the lake, much as an estuary serves as a nursery in a saltwater lagoon.

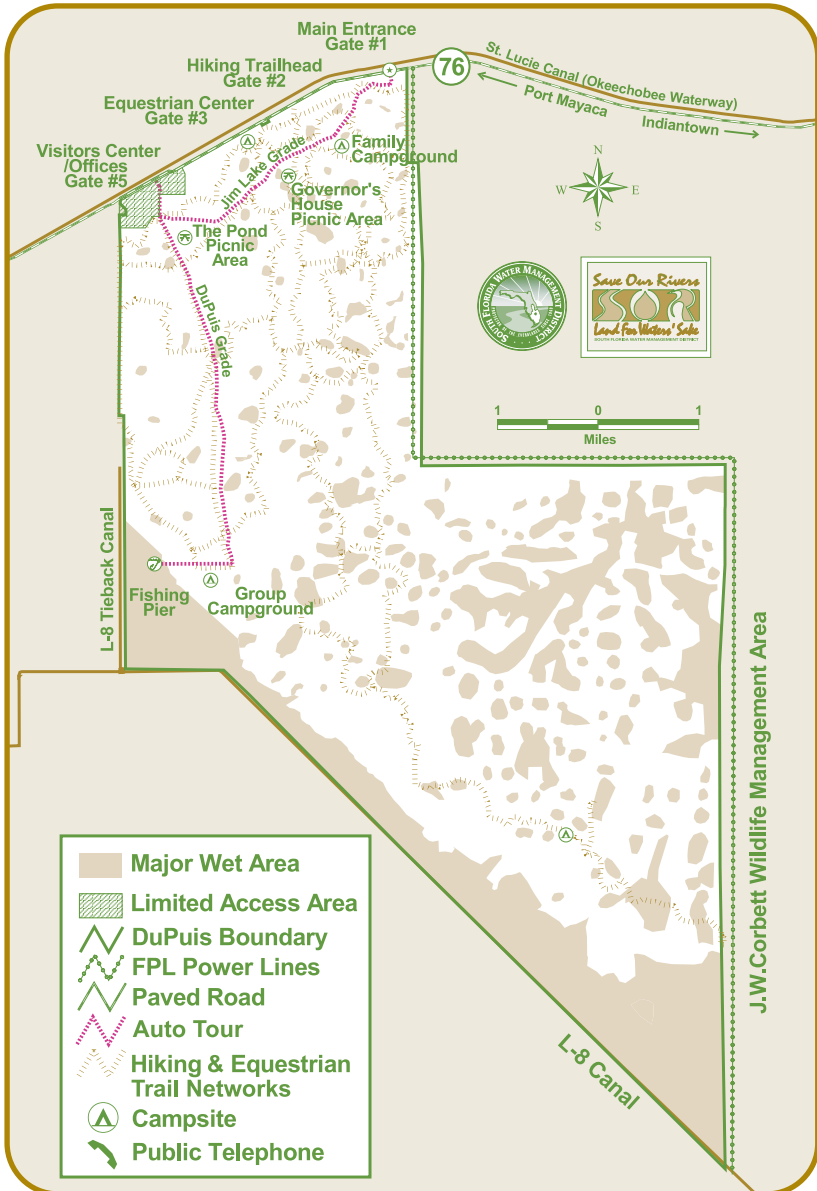


If you go fishing, be sure to follow appropriate fishing regulations as established by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

DuPuis Management Area

South Florida Water Management District

23500 SW Kanner Highway • Canal Point, FL 33438 • (561) 924-5310



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